

***Pasifikology*¹. News from psychologies' margins in Aotearoa/New Zealand: An interview with Siautu Alefaio-Tugia**

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Abstract

In Aotearoa/New Zealand critical psychology is vitally shaped by Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi, movements of indigenous renaissance that lie at the heart of revitalising biculturalism, and the impact of western colonisation in our geo-political region (Morgan, Coombes & Campbell, 2006). In this paper, we pick up the thread of critical engagements with culturally specific forms of psychological practice in the South Pacific, focusing on the movement to support indigenous psychology among diasporic Pacific peoples. We talk with Siautu Alefaio, one of the founding members of Pasifikology, about the development of this network connecting Pacific psychologists; the needs, challenges and inspiration for Pacific ways of working within the diaspora; and the significance of the network for promoting, informing, educating and mentoring the practice of psychology for Pasifika.

Keywords: Indigenous psychology, Pacific Peoples, Pasifikology, decolonisation

In our geo-political region the shape of critical psychology foregrounds Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi² and the movement of Māori renaissance that lies at the heart of revitalising biculturalism within local knowledge production (Morgan, Coombes & Campbell, 2006). The significance of indigenous psychological knowledge in our region takes its weight from the successes of Māori activism in transforming diverse psychological practices, often in challenging circumstances (see Levy, 2002; 2007). Aotearoa/New Zealand is politically constituted as a neo-liberal democracy, dominated by Pākehā sovereignty and institutions: the University and the discipline included.

Following a 'terrorist intervention' by the New Zealand police in 2007, activism has brought racism onto the public agenda, again. In October that year, paramilitary raids were carried out at over 60 locations ostensibly on the grounds that the people affected were linked with

¹ Pasifikology is a newly formed network involving Pasifika psychologists, graduates and students of psychology living, working and/or training in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

² "The Tiriti/Treaty was the first formal acknowledgement of both Māori and Pākehā as significant residents in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Māori as the indigenous people and British immigrants as first settlers. Māori have always recognised the Tiriti/Treaty as a kawenata/covenant (Hēnare & Douglas, 1988; Ramsden, 1990a) but it was not until 1975 that Pākehā Government officially acknowledged the Tiriti/Treaty as a constitutionally significant document [Treaty of Waitangi Act, 1975]" (Morgan, Coombes & Campbell, 2006, p. 52).

terrorist activity. Seventeen people were arrested, most were Māori with the Tuhoe nation significantly over-represented. These people were “variously, organic farmers, peace activists, indigenous snail rescuers, and Māori sovereignty activists and advocates” (Stewart-Harawira, 2008, p. 37). The charges against most have now been dropped, though significantly not those against some key Tuhoe activists. At the time, and subsequently, the events legitimated, again, the polarising racism that supported the constitution of Māori as potentially dangerous terrorists (Stewart-Harawira, 2008). While the media engaged heavily with this idea, there was far less coverage of the view that those arrested were acting within their inalienable rights to self-determination; or that the raids took place a matter of weeks after New Zealand refused to sign the United Nations declaration on Indigenous Rights – one of only four countries to refuse to do so when 143 did sign (Mutu, 2009)³. The racism, raids and denial of indigenous rights are reminiscent of earlier settler governments who took themselves to have the authority and the moral good necessary to legitimate acts of military terror against those who challenged them. The arrests have become events for re-telling, through master narratives of colonial political struggles (Buchanan, 2011). They speak to the continued privileging of whiteness that Robertson (2004) documents as normalised more widely in New Zealand social power relations.

In psychology, the scope of decolonising research (Smith, 1999) and space for indigenous ways of knowing is still constrained by the dominance of Pākehā⁴ epistemological assumptions and cultural practices, which are also evident more broadly (Robertson, 2004). The need for negotiated spaces that enable diverse and collaborative relationships between indigenous Māori and colonial Pākehā ways of knowing is clearly on the agenda for decolonising knowledge practices, and the possibilities for negotiating spaces for Pacific peoples are being discussed (Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009).

Geographically located in the South Pacific, Aotearoa/New Zealand is closely connected to other island nations whose peoples also constitute diasporic communities living here. People from Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea have made their homes, formed relationships and grown their families in Aotearoa. Pasifika peoples is a term used for all those who come from the region, and is inclusive of cultural diversity (Kalavite, 2010). At the last census, 6.9% of the population identified as Pacific peoples, with Samoans, Cook Islanders and Tongans the three largest ethnic groups identified specifically, and Samoa the largest of these. The strong relationship between Aotearoa and other South Pacific nations is multiply understood through various stories of the histories of Pacific peoples. In some, colonisation dominates. The master narrative of colonial political legitimacy frames migration to New Zealand through stories of indentured labour, ‘dawn raids’ and negative indicators of the wellbeing of Pacific peoples living in New Zealand. For instance, there is an account of Pacific peoples increasingly migrating to meet labour needs here after the Second World War. When spiralling oil prices deepened economic crisis and unemployment rates soared in the 1970s, the government led campaigns that effectively scapegoated Pacific peoples. By 1976, Pacific peoples were specifically targeted in strategies to identify ‘overstayers,’ those whose visas

³ After relentless campaigning by the Maori Party, the New Zealand Government finally delivered a statement of support of the Declaration to the U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues In April 2010 (Turia, 2010; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010).

⁴ The term Pākehā is used to identify people of European decent (usually) born in Aoteaora/New Zealand, and the white, western culture that is currently dominant. The term is contested and many of those descended from European settlers do not identify as Pākehā (see Bell, 1996).

had expired. The dark days of the ‘dawn raids’ when the homes of Pasifika were invaded by police looking for those who were constructed in public discourse as stealing work from those who were entitled to it (Stahl & Appleyard, 2007). The post-colonial story is usually organised around issues of labour, trade, markets and democratic nationalism.

There are also counter-narratives that both resist the construction of Pacific peoples as suffering deficits of various kinds, and draw attention to the racism, eurocentrism and colonialism that contextualise the experiences of Pasifika in Aotearoa. In these stories, the much longer history of migration within the region is prioritised over a postcolonial history that ignores the special relationships of the people, and their shared resilience and resistance to colonisation. For instance, there is an account of movement through the Pacific that is not only longer than the twentieth century focus framed by colonial narratives, but is also more attentive to the systems through which less material matters – ideas and skills for example – flow through inter-island migration (Barcham, Scheyvens & Overton, 2009). In this space, it is also possible to consider the tensions between Pasifika and Māori in Aotearoa as well as their commonalities, and the possibilities their connectedness opens up (Mafile’o & Walsh-Tapiata, 2007). Counter-narratives are also at work in more nuanced analyses of the influence of Pasifika on music, fashion and drama (see Colchester, 2003; Zemke-White, 2005). Even the ‘Dawn Raids’ have been reconstituted in these spaces, serving to re-tell the events of late 1970s as consolidating a decolonising movement/moment.

In psychology, negotiating space for indigenous Pacific knowledge travels alongside decolonising work focused on the effects of colonisation on Pasifika living in Aotearoa. Health inequities for Pacific peoples have become increasingly marked, alongside recognition of the effects of racism, social and structural inequalities in access to health care (see for example, Harris et.al. 2006). Negative trends have been critical in opening space to advocate for culture-specific and pan-pacific health services (Wright & Hornblow, 2008). Along with health, education is crucial since the workforce for delivering culturally appropriate health services is professionalised in a postcolonial context. How Universities negotiate space for culturally specific training significantly affects the success of Pasifika students, with flow on effects for the success of building professional capacity for health service provision of all kinds. Ng Shiu (2011) has found that within Pākehā dominant tertiary institutions, Samoan students’ success could be improved by strategies or interventions that are “embedded within fa’asmoa and encompass both the family and academic dimensions of Samoan learners” (p. 242). Kalavite (2010) also found that culturally specific concepts were crucial to the success of Tongan students, and that understanding and respect for Tongan and Pālagi⁵ academic and social traditions needed mutual in practice. Flexibility in conceptualising tā-vā kāinga (time-space relationships) was particularly vital. In *Social Work*, Mafile’o (2004) argues for fakafekau’aki (connecting) and fakatokilalo (humility) as concepts to guide culturally specific practice, when they are viewed holistically and grounded in specifically Tongan experiences. Increasingly, indigenous concepts are proposed as essential in working towards improved wellbeing for Pasifika in Aotearoa.

The fields of health, education and social work that interface with psychology and simultaneously concern Pasifika researchers are sites of critical indigenous dialogue. A history of migration within the South Pacific region and the potential for developing pan-pacific indigenous knowledges open spaces for wider negotiations among knowledge paradigms in our geo-political region (Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009). So, to update our

⁵ In contemporary use, the term Pālagi (and/or Papālagi) means “‘land of white people’ or ‘white people, Europeans’” (Tent & Gerharghty, 2001, p.171). Its etymology is uncertain and it is widely used in Pasifika languages.

earlier discussion, Mandy interviewed Siautu Alefaio about the birth of Pasifikology: a network of Pasifika psychologists, graduates and students of psychology.

Siautu was born in New Zealand of Samoan descent. We all work in the same school and Siautu teaches into a programme that trains psychologists for general registration with the New Zealand Psychologists' Board. She is also involved with Massey University's Pasifika Directorate. Before joining the staff at Massey, Siautu was involved in community development work in various settings, including Child Youth and Family Specialist Services, Youth Mental Health, Special Education Policy Development, and the Department of Corrections. She has been a member of the New Zealand Psychologists Board and on the Pasifika advisory board for Counties Manukau Police⁶ (<http://www.pasifikology.co.nz/page/22-our-people+siautu-alefaio>).

We learnt about Pasifikology through her passionate advocacy for Pasifika students, and developing Pasifika knowledges. In this interview she speaks of the needs, challenges and inspiration for Pacific ways of working within the diaspora and the significance of the network for promoting, informing, educating and mentoring the practice of psychology for Pasifika⁷.

Pasifikology

Mandy: Kia orana Siautu. When the editor for this issue asked for an update on interesting happenings in this region, we thought of Pasifikology and this seemed like a good place to let people know that this is a new development for Aotearoa.

Siautu: Talofa lava⁸ and thank you for the opportunity to share a bit about the journey of Pasifikology. This is my own journey-story into Pasifikology, and others might have their own versions.

Prior to the Australasian Psychological Society's conference in 2002 [bringing together the NZ and Australian Psychological Societies], I happened to be in private practice feeling a bit isolated and wanting to connect with my peers. At one of my regular supervision sessions (with Sue Mafi, an experienced Registered Clinical Psychologist and long time advocate and supporter for Pacific peoples in Psychology) we talked about this conference and discussed putting the call out "to see who is out there" with the idea of doing something together for the conference. I thought that there may be a number of us who were qualified now and practicing who could start to connect with each other. There were a handful of us, and we knew each other, [and there had been] different connections at different times over the span of a decade. From putting that call out we just started meeting up for lunches, connecting up with each other in our first attempts to just support each other – really grass roots.

We decided really quickly [that] this conference was the time for us to get together and present, even though we hadn't all met each other at that stage. We all helped bring others on board. I was meeting with a couple of Pacific students studying clinical psychology who were needing support and would come and talk to me about the issues that they were having. We were all starting to support each other, help problem solve, figure out how to work with the issues in our workplaces. And it just seemed that those were my experiences, even though they were other people's experiences. So, we decided that this would be the heart; to support

⁶ See <http://www.pasifikology.co.nz/page/22-our-people+siautu-alefaio>

⁷ This interview has been edited from its full transcription and we have collaborated to produce the written version.

⁸ Tongan and Samoan forms of greeting have been used by Mandy and Siautu (respectively), here, with respect for the Pacific focus of the discussion.

each other first and foremost. Then we decided that we would go ahead and present at this Australasian conference to get out a message about Pacific peoples inside psychology. It was quite a spontaneous, organic way of coming together and at the conference, some of us met for the first time. That conference produced the energy, as if we had known each other for a long time. We had huge synergies; really good connections with one another. We aspired to meet more regularly but we all had our own lives so over the span of the next four or five years we would get together when we could.

We had another opportunity to present together when the Māori and Psychology Research Unit at Waikato University invited us to be a part of the symposium they were hosting in 2007. We were still a network and we were just trying to find our own feet: Not necessarily in our own practices but together. The Waikato whānau (aiga/family)] took us under their wing, and have supported and still support us today. We continue to hold in our hearts the connection with tangata whenua and especially the whānau at Waikato who provided opportunities for us.

When I look at our journey, it has never been about one person; it has always been about the needs of all of us - the collective 'we'. We had initially tried to connect when we were students but of course, we were all just trying to get to the end of our studies. I think a seed was sown in our hearts during the Australasian conference and it was further solidified through our involvement and aiga presentation at the Claiming Spaces: National Maori and Pacific Psychologies Symposium (November, 2007). After the Waikato Claiming Spaces symposium we reflected on all our experiences and we recognised that there was such similarity in our journey stories that we wanted to bring together a more formal network that could support Pasifika students coming through psychology. One of the key issues we recognised was that it was a lonely journey for each of us. It wasn't something that was culture friendly and it wasn't something that was friendly to our values and beliefs. It wasn't an easy journey, and for all of us there were stages where we were not going to keep studying psychology. We shared many similar journey stories and whilst there were some of us through to the other side, we were now listening to Pacific students who were encountering the same struggle in their experiences of psychology.

Mandy: Those issues that you shared with each other seemed to have a lot to do with growing the heart for being together.

Siautu: Very much so, I think that gave us the passion and drive to keep coming together, because every time we came together there was just such strength. I always felt really encouraged, energised, refreshed and reinvigorated. It might just be morning tea but knowing there are others of us with whom we can share and not actually have to explain the way we think, the way we do things, why we do the things the way we do. It is such a joy. When we talk to each other about our communities and case issues we know the nuances; the Pacific ways of knowing, being and doing that we can share, and laugh and be okay with. In our own way, we are creating safe spaces for us to have those conversations and not be misunderstood or be looked at, as awkward.

Mandy: That resonates for me with some of the other stories I've heard about working in an institution like a university, doing psychology, when there is a taken for granted Pālagi ways of doing things and therefore you are always trying to explain yourself and when you're together you don't have to do that.

Siautu: It makes everything so much faster when you don't have to explain a lot. You can be free to agree that we're disagreeing and just go with it. Sharing such strong similarities in our personal journey stories forged that kind of connectedness and made us not feel so isolated any more. I'm not the only one that felt like I was failing at one stage, you know. It also meant that we could pick each other up and navigate ways of understanding what we were currently dealing with in our own different workspaces.

Mandy: Are the workspaces diverse where you came from?

Siautu: Yes. We are representative of the main scopes of psychological practice that are dominant in New Zealand⁹. In terms of diversity in the work that we actually do I think there is huge variability in the range and depth of work undertaken. Often people are not just working in one service: they may be in the same role across a range of different services in a region. In our Pasifikology network our previous Chair (Michael Satele) is a great example of the range of workplaces in psychology that are represented, he heads a church based social service organisation for the Pacific region, which is probably a new direction, and way of working for community. I think that's forging new ground too and probably more familiar ground for Pacific peoples.

Mandy: How does the church's work fit in? I can see that it's something new but very Pacific. So I'm thinking about others who might be reading this and might not see the connection between the church as a new direction for psychological practice, and it being very Pacific.

Siautu: When I think of psychology, I think of it being so far removed from the church and from Pacific communities and even Pacific people: the word itself is so foreign - people have no idea what psychology is. Regionally, in the Pacific if you mention seeing a psychologist, typical reactions would be, "what is psychology?, what does that actually look like?" In the Pacific most social, emotional and psychological issues are dealt with in the realm of faith, it is the responsibility of Ministers, Pastors and Reverends whose training lies in theology. In the different Pacific islands, there are theological colleges everywhere, and people understand the roles of ministry, and how they interact with their everyday lives. Perhaps if you're a psychologist working within a church they can understand your role better. From the point of view of psychology, I think that it will be very new to think of psychologists in churches and church organisations. I think that would be quite a new space for psychology.

Mandy: So, the message I am getting is that ministry is understood in Pasifika communities and psychology isn't; am I on track?

Siautu: I know for me as a Pacific psychologist of Samoan descent, I see it as a new mission field - it's the lens that I have had to apply to psychology for me to be safe with being in this discipline. Otherwise, I wouldn't be in this space; I would do something else because it is too

⁹ Here Siautu is referring to vocational scopes that define the competencies of practitioners who are registered as psychologists by The New Zealand Psychologists Board. The Board is the regulatory authority responsible for ensuring that psychologists are competent and fit to practise their profession under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003. The title 'psychologist' is protected under the Act, and cannot be used by anyone who is not registered by the Board. As well as the general scope of 'psychologist,' 'intern' and 'trainee psychologist', the Board registers psychologists under 'clinical', 'counselling' and 'educational' scopes.

foreign a way of being. I think for those of us, who have been here, we have been able to reconcile our own understanding of psychology. For me I look back at it historically. It matters to me that the word, psyche, has come from a place that was about the heart of people. Even though they say psyche is a myth, it resonates more with me than the development of the science of psychology, which seeks to objectify people and seeks to understand human nature and behaviour in that way - that is just so foreign to Pacific peoples. I feel in my heart, really agitated and very frustrated with the whole practice of objectifying; looking at people as objects rather than people. I think that Pasifikology has chartered new ground to create, together with people, new spaces for working that are not one-dimensional anymore; that are really about looking at things from multi-dimensional perspectives and considering lots of angles. It's okay to consider other ways of thinking about people's issues and dilemmas and problems.

Mandy: How does this connect with Pasifikology's mission?

Siautu: Our mission is to grow a network, a heart; the heart that supports and promotes and grows psychology *for* Pasifika. And that mission, well the mission for me personally in regards to being Pacific and in psychology, is about creating knowledge, creating space in the formation of knowledge and creating new knowledge for the discipline of psychology to begin to take notice of other ways of understanding people's problems. The discipline of psychology is continuously growing so for me the mission is about supporting and promoting anything that is going to grow psychology in that direction.

Mandy: So is there a connection for you between this growth and indigenous knowledge?

Siautu: Yes, definitely! In many ways we all recognise there are ways of knowing, being and doing that are directly informed by our cultural context. In the 'learning of psychology', some of us have experienced needing to "just get through it, to put our heads down and just do it". After that, we could object to things that we were learning. We couldn't object while we were doing our training because it would be interpreted as us not really knowing psychology or that there were things that we obviously hadn't learned in our training. So we couldn't object too much to what we were learning, because we had to learn it first. That is one of the familiar experiences we have come across when we are talking together, how we have just had to put our heads down and do the training and then after that we can say, "that doesn't work for us." The dialogue then turns to finding ways to inform the discipline and practice of psychology about how best to work with Pasifika peoples.

Psychology has provided, I think, a favourable wind in terms of charting the new waters that we're in now with the diasporic movements, especially as we are now such a global village. Due to the historical migration routes we are now in new lands, we are children of these new lands; I am a child of Aotearoa/ New Zealand but my heart is still connected to Samoa and its places and lands. Even though I was birthed in *this* cultural context, my heart was nurtured in another context. And that's what I respond to, and that's what I understand and that's the kind of language that's more transformative for me. I think that when I work with Samoan families and other Pacific families I recognise the story of migration, the struggle that our parents have had in terms of the hard labour jobs that they worked to give their children better lives and the huge sacrifice of leaving a homeland for one filled with 'milk and honey'. These are the rich cultural contexts that are often misunderstood by psychologists because they are trained to only look and listen for the so-called 'normalised' type of behaviour. So, for instance, when parents aren't seemingly paying attention to children, it might be that the

grandparents are the main caregivers as it has been common practice for grandparents to often be the primary caregiver and parents the income earners: Therefore the role of extended aiga (family) is of primary importance in the exploration of familial relationships.

It seems to me, there are ways of understanding people from Pacific ways of knowing, being and doing that are not visible in the discipline of psychology. I learnt about the fundamentals of psychology, which to me is the Pālagi way of understanding human behaviour, and understanding the discipline helped me to put it into perspective. The Pālagi way is the way I work when I go into the professional psychology world. It's like putting on a uniform. When you put on your uniform you put on everything, just like an actor, and you speak the language, because English is the language of psychology and that's the way I talk, and operate in that system.

But when I work with Samoan people, hands on, in the field, it is all my nurturing experiences as a child of a minister who was very involved in the community, who witnessed and became involved in managing many conflicts - there were many times that we were involved collectively as a family in resolving conflicts, that I bring. I learnt my ways of conflict resolution by watching my father manage relationships and the words that he used, in Samoan language, to address people, to understand the situation, the timing. You know there is training in counselling about timing and pacing. I learnt that from watching my Dad and from being involved in youth leadership from a young age. In my profession the words and language are different but the intent is the same, so in my profession I'm able to language what I'm doing from my Samoan cultural framework. And then, from this framework, I'm able to see and understand what is going on in the Pālagi world. I can see really clearly where the Western framework operates from, but I also know that a Western framework has no idea of how we operate when we go into dialogue with our Pacific families. I think if they were to see us work they would wonder "what's going on here"?

Mandy: So it's a whole different way of knowing about being a person?

Siautu: Yes, because language is different. When we get together in Pasifikology and we talk about the different ways in which we're practicing or understanding Pacific people, there's just so much synergy - we'll talk about a case and ask questions that are so different. I know I am asked questions that are very different from those I would normally be asked from my non-Pacific colleagues.

Mandy: I was thinking as you're talking about different languages, that as we are talking about Pacific peoples, there are also many different languages. So, are you working in English with your colleagues?

Siautu: Yes, English is a dominant language and Pasifikology is English too. So is Pacific, because it's a concept created to describe homogeneity. The Western framework is about homogeneity; it's not about diversity. And yet Pacific Island nations in themselves are hugely diverse, the languages of Papua New Guinea are hundreds and the different dialects are so vast in number. There are different kinds of interactions between the Island groups as well, and it's those inter-island differences that I think you need to be able to be informed about, to understand the different psyches. We often talk about the Samoan psyche, the Tongan psyche, those ways of being that are Samoan, that are Tongan - they are different across the different Island nations. There are similarities, even more so because of the diasporic movements; similarities in our history of migration, and settling. Those stories will always be

similar. But if we go back to our origin island nations, and we understand the ways of being within our language, embedded within our own histories, we will begin to forge a greater understanding of how we can support each other.

Coming back to our roots makes me appreciate the diversity, the heartbeat of what life is, and ways of understanding, like feagaiga, which is the relationship between brother and sister in Samoa. Sisters were upheld as the ‘apple of the brother’s eye’. That’s still very relevant today, and if we understand that then when we work with a family, we can perhaps understand the conflict better. For example, in the violence prevention programme, you can understand better when a man has been violent enough to put his brother-in-law in hospital, that he was protecting his sister. When you understand feagaiga you can understand how that’s come about, and then you can help to remediate it. If you don’t understand feagaiga you won’t have a clue.

Psychology in the New Zealand context has mainly been borne out of the Euro-American traditions, it was not something that was born from our Island roots, but because of the globalisation, it is going to inevitably impact island nations, and I saw it in the tsunami¹⁰.

Mandy: Could you talk a little bit about that because I was thinking of the way in which the diasporic collective gathers together to act after such a tragic event. It was an important moment I think?

Siautu: There were a lot of things happening for me during that time and space. What was most significant for me is what I call “the return of the children home”. Many Samoans returned to the homeland during the Tsunami of September 29th, 2009 in various capacities. Samoan doctors and nurses led New Zealand based aid teams, myself and Epenesa were requested to be part of the NZ immediate response team as Samoan speaking psychologists. Dr Monique Faleafa coordinated our team, so this was a very Pacific-led response, which recognised the need to have ‘language-abled’ practitioners in the field. Many Samoans came and supported local-led response and recovery efforts. The overseas leadership by the Samoan diaspora was something very foreign to a lot of international aid teams that descended on Samoa.

Mandy: So where to from here?

Siautu: To be honest we’re doing grassroots things right now. I think that’s what I’m excited about, because I think that we’re heading in a direction that’s going to forge tighter collegial space that is perhaps going to provide new knowledge. Before the tsunami work we were just trying to support each other, networking, trying to figure out what this all is. Now we’ve kind of done some promotion and launching of ‘the brand’ so our work is better known. But Pasifikology isn’t a brand, it’s us, and I think now we are coming back to us; we’re coming back to growing our heart. Out of that I think is going to come the next phase for Pasifikology, which I hope will be forming new knowledges, practices and ways of understanding Pacific people and to really support the students that are coming through.

Mandy: That sounds like much needed new direction to me and a good place to finish, but before we do I wondering if you could say something about your decision to come to psychology. As we’ve talked it I’ve come to see something of how Pasifikology responds to a need within the diaspora. It’s almost a necessity to negotiate with this pālagi discipline, this pālagi institution because of immigration and also because of the globalisation of whiteness

¹⁰ In September 2009 a subterranean earthquake in the Samoan Islands sent a devastating tsunami through the South Pacific. 149 people lost their lives in Samoa, 34 died in American Samoa and 9 lives were lost in Tonga. While some islands were less seriously affected, the destruction and loss were unparalleled in the region.

that's so rapidly happening. I wonder about your decision to come to psychology, and think about it being a we/you? How did you make that decision?

Siautu: What, me personally?

Mandy: Yeah, you personally, in that context, [if it makes sense].

Siautu: For me personally it was through prayer. It was my own spiritual journey. I didn't want to come to psychology, I mean it wasn't my first choice. Law was my first choice but in my first year I did what everyone else does at the beginning and studied education and English and I also did psychology. Psychology was part of my education studies and that's when my eyes kind started to look, and I became curious about what a Samoan person does in psychology and I just had to figure it out myself. But my own personal decision to go with psychology was a spiritual one. It was one that I considered and prayed about and sought counsel from my own family. I found a way I reconciled it for my own thinking, so that I could engage with the actual subject matter. I just said to myself, "this must be the way that man was trying to understand God". I understood all these theories, as the way people want to try and understand who God is. That is how I read; read my textbooks, read the theories. That's how I engaged with them. To me, these were people on that journey, just like I was on that journey really, and I'm still on that journey. We won't ever know, but that's how I read those theories and engaged with the texts and struggled through psychology.

Mandy: So without anyone else at that time, you're really relying on experiences outside of psychology?

Siautu: Yeah, definitely.

Mandy: It sounds like a significant struggle to me?

Siautu: Going back to my roots is helping me to understand my place better. I thought I understood it, but the more I return to my indigenous epistemology and ways of understanding, the more I recognise there's just so much to learn. In Pasifikology, in our practice discussions, that's what we begin to talk about; we talk about families and we ask each other questions like, "did he do this because of this?". Or you know, or in a Tongan family, we might talk about the importance of the fahu of the family; that's the elder sister who has authority. We might consider talking to her about engaging the brother in a family gathering, which is also a meeting that needs to happen. That's where I'm at now, personally, in terms of my own journey in psychology; going back to my roots.

Mandy: In terms of your own personal journey and the journeys that that others in Pasifikology have made, you've now created a space where it's possible to go back to your roots?

Siautu: I hope that the space we've created allows us and others to appreciate the wisdom of ages which comes from our roots.

My father said to me, "the Western man came and brought God; the one that we can't see, the one we can't touch and made God abstract. And we have come to give God another face that isn't just abstract God. To us, we can see, touch, feel and hear God." That was something that got me more interested in psychology, I guess, and the way knowledge is represented. The way we work in a therapeutic environment for example, it can be more than just 'talking'.

Like when we finish something that is hugely emotive, we eat and it's symbolic of the closing of some deep hurt, the re-nourishing of our bodies. Also, it's hospitable; there are lots of meanings behind that.

Negotiating Spaces

We introduced this interview with Siautu in a context where agendas for decolonising knowledge practices have increasingly acknowledged the need for more collaborative relationships between Pākehā/Pālagi ways of knowing and indigenous knowledges of the Pacific. Since Pākehā/Pālagi privilege still dominates our knowledge producing institutions, as it does more broadly in Aotearoa/New Zealand, we recognise the need to *work* towards negotiating spaces. As Pasifikology flourishes in the spaces the network creates for support, education and mentoring, it is also crucial that Pākehā/Pālagi recognise their cultural specificity so as to be accountable for their privilege and open up to new and diverse ways of knowing. Critically important to this work is taking the time to talk with each other – and especially for Pākehā/Pālagi to listen, openly for differences.

From our Pālagi places, after speaking and writing with Siautu, we've reflected on what we might offer you, as readers, by way of commentary. This is a tricky space of negotiation and we hesitate to occupy the place where we 'wrap up' our conversation with Siautu rather than leaving her with the last word. In our geo-political location, the privileges of colonial political legitimacy are embedded in our 'taken-for-granted' cultural context. Our interpretations, always partial anyway, are especially lacking in relation to Siautu's telling of her journey as a psychologist of Samoan decent. As you read our final comments, we'd like to share some of the lessons we've learned in our place and some of the ways in which we understand our tricky position as we're writing.

At the *2007 National Māori and Pacific Psychologies Symposium* Cabrini 'Ofa Makasiale and her colleagues discussed the problems of involving European/ Pālagi /Pākehā researchers in 'cross cultural' research, and the principles they'd developed for privileging indigenous voices in cross cultural research teams. These principles largely concern the centrality of indigenous voices, values, aspirations, the necessity for negotiation with cultural consultants and ongoing commitment to the indigenous community in which research is conducted. The fifth principle says that:

European researchers must accept that they will never understand fully. This principle became evident as the pālagi researchers were forced to engage the radical otherness of the Pasifika co-researchers and research participants. This is in line, however, with the writings of Linda Tuhiwai Smith: "It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us" (Smith, 1999, p. 1). Indigenous people must always be honoured as those who are the creators of their own cultures and nations, and their rich insights and experiences cannot be fully comprehended simply through participation in a joint, cross-cultural project ('Ofa Makasiale, Patterson, Silipa, Agee & Culbertson, 2008, p.30).

Indigenous Pacific knowledges are crucial to Siautu's sense of resistance, personally, as well as to the socio-political projects of decolonisation. She speaks of resisting psychology's scientific practices of objectification, contrasting these to knowledges of the heart of people, and opportunities for multiplicity and diversity in addressing the issues people face. Such resistance, though, depends on the legitimacy of qualifying through the academic institution

of disciplinary psychology. Being able to speak, legitimately, from a position of expertise within psy-discourse enables the dialogue needed to open space for indigenous knowledges. Siautu gives testimony to the difficulty of learning the discipline. Pasifikology emerges at the point where there were “a handful” of Pacific people engaging with a discipline dominated by Pālagi and European ways of knowing. She and her colleagues are few and we Pālagi are many. We variously perpetuate the master narratives of colonisation through our predominant presence and cultural privilege.

In supporting each other, Siautu and her colleagues began creating spaces where collective commitment to the needs of all, including needs for decolonising theory and research, began enabling counter narratives and practices. Sharing their taken-for-granted worlds in their own space broke their isolation and strengthened their connectedness. She speaks of the critical importance of connectedness for creating space for indigenous ways of knowing, and resilience in the face of Pālagi /Pākehā institution. We also recognise connectedness as thematic of spiritual experiences, with especial thanks to Virginia Tamanui (2002) for articulating, so clearly, how spirit, joy and connectedness relate for Māori women. We remember the way in which our individualist, materialist culture has produced a taken-for-granted disconnection between spirit and knowing. The process of colonisation involves denial of indigenous spiritual beliefs, alongside language suppression, introduced disease, land theft, the imposition of patriarchal values (Makaere, 1999), all manner of discursive practices of assimilation.

We recognise our lack of understanding very clearly, at the tension we experience in relation to the intersections of Christianity/colonisation and spiritual mission/decolonising project. The Church as a site of psychological practice and decolonising work in psychology that Siautu speaks of, is strangely dissonant to us from our Pālagi places in critical, and feminist, psy-discourse. Since we do not know, then our experience of this tension alerts us to scrutinise the historical and cultural conditions of Christianity/colonisation in our location.

The forms of scientific psychology that we usually analyse constitute western individualism as if the privileges of cultural dominance were the naturally universal; all human subjects are composed of mind and body and/or cognition, affect and behaviour. These sciences have simultaneously produced a taken-for-granted disconnection between legitimate knowledge and spiritual experience. Yet we're aware that indigenous Pacific knowing of personhood is inclusive of “mind, body, spirit, family and environment”, and diverse Pacific psychological models of holistic wellbeing are in increasingly articulated within psychology. For instance, Samoan, Tongan and Cook Island models were presented in keynote addresses at the significant *2007 National Māori and Pacific Psychologies Symposium* (Levy, Nikora, Waitoki, Rua & Masters-Awatere, 2008). Although our encounters with those who are speaking of indigenous knowledges are brief, we've learnt that in opening spaces for radical differences, spirit and heart matter.

We've read the counter-narrative accounts of historical complicity between Christian missionaries and colonial governments in the imposition of Pālagi dominance. While their motives were “not always synchronous, the policies of both, nevertheless, were rationalized through ideological commitment to the superiority of the white race and the dominance of European civilization” (Morgan, Coombes, Neill-Weston & Weatherley, 2011, p. 197). We are wary of the Christian patriarchal institutions that were integral to colonisation and familiar with practices that treat religion and spirit as interchangeable.

We're also wary of our Pālagi heritage of assimilationist policies and the homogenising effects of constituting Pacific Peoples through English, through science, through Pālagi analysis of religion and dominant practices of individualising, materialist reductionism. We suspect they produce a blind spot for us. We specifically do not know how reclaiming the spiritual experiences that colonial process denied could work to decolonise psychological practice for Pacific Peoples. And since we don't apprehend the rich insights and experiences that Siautu shares with us, we listen:

My father said to me, "the Western man came and brought God; the one that we can't see, the one we can't touch and made God abstract. And we have come to give God another face that isn't just abstract God. To us, we can see, touch, feel and hear God."

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